Literature as an Educational Tool
A Study about Learning through Literature and How Literature Contributes to the Development of Vocabulary

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Abstract

The aim and purpose of this essay is to investigate how literature can be used as an educational tool and as a source for learning acquisition. More specifically, this essay investigates whether literature can facilitate vocabulary acquisition by exploring different aspects of learning through literature and by implementing a study to see how literature contributes to the development of vocabulary. The results of the study show improvement on vocabulary breadth with the help of literature and consequently serve to reinforce the importance of literature and substantiate the reasons why literature is used in school. This essay can serve as supplementary evidence for the significance and relevance of literature as an educational tool.

Keywords: Learning through literature, vocabulary acquisition, literature as an educational tool, language development
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1. Introduction

The notion of how literature is claimed to contribute to language development is appealing, especially for teachers. It is stated in the Swedish national curriculum that literature is to be a part of the education in both secondary and upper secondary school (Lgr11, 33). The fact that literature is an important aspect of education and the fact that according to Skolverket (a public authority that is part of the Swedish Department of Education) literature is a mandatory part of English education, should raise the level of interest, and also the relevance and significance of this issue.

According to Bo Lundahl, literature is fundamental when it comes to language ability and language development (2012: p. 403). He also claims that literature contributes to developing an understanding for historical, economical and social conditions in different parts of the world as well as providing a way to ‘meet’ other cultures. Most importantly, Lundahl claims that literature contributes to language development and, more specifically, vocabulary acquisition (2012: p. 404). However, Parkinson and Thomas point out that “the status of the text as literature is not important – the activities could equally well be done with a journalistic or nonfiction text” (2004: p. 32). Nevertheless, arguments for using literature as a means of developing language are several. Parkinson and Thomas claim that there are at least ten reasons for using literature, such as, among other things, for the sake of cultural enrichment, mental training, and because how literature has a ‘genuine feel’ since “the literary texts so often touch on themes to which learners can bring a personal response from their own experience” (2004: p. 10). Conclusively, the reason for using a literary text as opposed to a nonfiction text is that literature contributes to the development of not only vocabulary, but also other aspects of language and furthermore issues regarding culture and society.

On the notion of vocabulary acquisition, Ulrika Tornberg states that it is a creative process and that the text and the words in the text are connected and dependent on each other (2007: p. 100). This is why vocabulary is indispensible when it comes to literature; a text is, after all, built with words and without knowing or understanding the words, the text cannot be interpreted or understood in any way by the reader. In other words, if one’s vocabulary is poor, the intended message or meaning of the text is lost. Vocabulary is a tool, which helps the reader decipher and understand a text.
Additionally, vocabulary acquisition is a profoundly important part of language development and a developed vocabulary is the most important requirement in order to understand a text according to Lundahl. He also states that there is an adjacent connection between reading and vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, Lundahl means that as vocabulary develops, the possibilities of reading and understanding literature develop simultaneously as reading contributes to developing vocabulary (2012: p. 334). Lundahl also claims that in order to assimilate the content of a written text, one must recognize at least 95% of the words (2012: p. 340).

Steven A. Stahl and William E. Nagy further emphasize the importance of vocabulary knowledge for reading comprehension: “[r]eadings is far more than recognizing words and remembering their meanings, but if the reader does not know the meanings of a sufficient proportion of the words in the text, comprehension is impossible” (2006: p. 4).

Since literature is said to contribute to language development and more specifically vocabulary, and since vocabulary is essential in order to acquire and understand a text – the purpose of this essay is to investigate how literature, (as fiction: novels, short stories, drama, poetry), can be used as an educational tool and as a source for learning acquisition. This essay will investigate whether literature can facilitate language acquisition, more specifically vocabulary acquisition. This essay is to investigate different aspects of learning through literature and to see if literature can contribute to the development of vocabulary and how this can be used as an argument for using literature as an educational tool. The essay is to investigate the hypothesis that literature contributes to acquire and develop vocabulary.

Different approaches to reading, such as bottom-up and top-down processes, are addressed as well as the notion of intensive and extensive reading, in section 2.1. Ways to acquire vocabulary are also discussed, such as meaning-focused input and language-focused input as well as incidental and intentional learning in section 2.2. More aspects of vocabulary are also addressed, such as the notion of receptive and productive knowledge and also breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. In section 2.3 different aspects of assessing vocabulary knowledge are discussed and in the final section of the literature review all the aspects on literature and vocabulary acquisition are discussed and reviewed.

A study will be performed which investigates if literature can contribute to developing vocabulary. The study is discussed in the section called ‘Method’, which
comes after the literature review. The results and the analysis of the results come next and lastly the conclusion summarizes and concludes the essay.
2. Literature Review

In the following literature review, different approaches to reading are addressed as well as ways to acquire vocabulary. Different aspects of assessing vocabulary knowledge are also discussed as well as the role of literature on vocabulary acquisition.

2.1 Reading and Second Language Acquisition

There are two concepts that must be considered in order to understand how a second language is acquired through reading which are the bottom-up approach and the top-down approach. According to H. Douglas Brown, the bottom-up approach requires the reader to have a rather refined knowledge about the language itself since it is about deciphering linguistic signals (such as letters, words, phrases, syllables et cetera.) and from all that data the reader must select the signals that make sense in order to assimilate the content of the text and create meaning. The top-down approach emphasizes the reader’s previous knowledge and in order to understand a text the reader must draw on their own intelligence and experiences (2007: p. 358). Tornberg states that from the top-down approach the reader is more active in the assimilation of the content and creation of the meaning in the text. She also claims that the top-down approach is influenced by the reader’s own intelligence and personal experiences and that the way the reader assimilates the content and creates meaning is personally interpreted (2007: p. 74).

When the reader encounters a text in his or her native language, the process of deciphering the text probably occurs unconsciously, according to Tornberg. However, when the reader encounters a text in a second or foreign language he/she will probably encounter unfamiliar words and expressions, which means that the text probably will be approached from the bottom-up, in other words, deciphering small bits of the text such as words and phrases, to be able to understand the text on the whole (2007: p. 74). In conclusion, a bottom-up approach would be preferable when it comes to the assimilation of the content of a text and vocabulary acquisition in a second language. However, Tornberg points out that it is also possible to approach this issue by implementing the top-down process by letting the reader guess the meaning of an unfamiliar word by, among other things, employing previous knowledge about the world and by assessing the context which surrounds the word that can contribute to assimilating the content of the text (2007: p. 76).
Brown claims that the combination of the two is the most favorable:

More recent research on teaching reading has shown that a combination of top-down and bottom-up processing, or what has come to be called interactive reading, is almost always a primary ingredient in successful teaching methodology because both processes are important. “In practice, a reader continually shifts from one focus to another, now adopting a top-down approach to predict probable meaning, then moving to the bottom-up approach to check whether that is really what the writer says”. (Brown, 2007; p.358)

According to McCormick there are three different approaches to reading. From the cognitive approach the reader is required to draw on prior knowledge to be able to assimilate and process texts. The expressivist approach requires the reader to draw on life experience in the reading process (1994: p. 13). The third approach is the social-cultural approach, which “privileges the cultural context in which reading occurs” (1994: p. 14). The cognitive approach is about logical thinking whereas the expressivist approach is about inferring a meaning for the text and is based on the reader’s own life experience. The social-cultural approach is about how social and cultural aspects affect the reader’s construction of the text. The most relevant approach to take into consideration when it comes to the notion of learning through literature would be the cognitive approach since “[t]he cognitive research that underlies this industry aims to dissect and quantify every aspect of the reading process” (1994: p. 16). McCormick also points out that a cognitive approach to reading is considered to be a hierarchy of skills, where the reader must master a particular set of skills in order to ‘advance’, and that these skills “are thought to begin at the micro-level of letter and word recognition where reading is seen simply as ‘the translation of written elements into language’ --- and then to move to more complex ‘thinking’ and ‘comprehension’ abilities” (1994: p. 16). Furthermore “[t]he study of reading ‘comprehension’ is the primary focus of cognitive work, and it is studied – largely so that it can be more effectively taught – on every level: word, sentence, paragraph, story” (1994; p.16).

This cognitive approach to reading can be related to the bottom-up approach where the focus lies on deciphering the text on, as McCormick expressed it, a micro-level of letter and word recognition. However, she also states that it is important to consider “the importance of a reader’s prior knowledge and of the active role readers
play in the construction of meaning”, emphasizing the importance of relating the text to prior knowledge and experience in order to fully assimilate the content of the text and to be able to create meaning (1994: p. 17). The notion of how readers construct meaning, and that it is not the text in itself that carries meaning is known as schema theory, and according to Brown “[t]he reader brings information, knowledge, emotion, experience, and culture, that is – schemata (plural) – to the printed word” (2007: p. 358). He also points out that “[s]kill in reading depends on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge about the world” (2007: p. 359). Nilsson also points out that according to Smith, reading is about searching for meaning and purpose and that the reader must be able to draw on his or her own experiences and interests in order to fully get invested in the text (2007: p. 79). This schema theory has connections with the expressivist approach and the social-cultural approach to reading, as it is about inferring meaning to the text and drawing on one’s life experience to be able to do this. However, to be able to infer meaning, the reader must first be able to understand the words and the phrases to be able to understand what the text is about, which is where the cognitive approach comes in.

Nation further claims that a distinction can be made between extensive and intensive reading. Intensive reading involves a close deliberate study of a short text and the aim of intensive reading is to understand the text from a linguistic perspective, which pays attention to vocabulary, grammar and discourse, while extensive reading focuses on the meaning of the text and does not generally, according to Nation “involve much additional language use other than filling out a brief book report form” (2001: p. 149). However, it is also stated that “studies show that extensive reading benefits quality of language use, language knowledge and general academic performance” (2001: p. 150). Furthermore, Lundahl claims that extensive reading focuses entirely on the content of the text, and that the amount of reading is important in order to develop vocabulary. Another important aspect to take in consideration when it comes to vocabulary development and extensive reading is that in order for vocabulary to develop, other than that it requires large quantities of text, the reader must bump into new words repeatedly and regularly (2012: p. 276).

In the next section of the literature review, the focus will be on different aspects of acquiring and developing vocabulary.
2.2 Acquiring and Developing Vocabulary

According to Lundahl, the words students learn in school are learned through reading and writing where vocabulary is approached from a more explicit and conscious position, which makes the students more aware of vocabulary acquisition. When vocabulary is acquired and developed through reading, it is, according to Lundahl, called meaning-focused input. A meaning-focused input of reading requires that words be repeated frequently in order to acquire them properly (2012: p. 340). According to Nation, a meaning-focused input focuses on the message, includes a small number of unfamiliar items and draws attention to the new items. However, when it comes to acquiring vocabulary more specifically, Nation refers to language-focused learning that focuses on language features such as vocabulary and entails “deliberate repeated retrieval of the items” which can be achieved through activities like word cards, grammar exercises and by reading a difficult text (Nation: p. 401).

A meaning-focused approach to acquiring vocabulary would be described as incidental learning, which, according to Lundahl, involves learning something as a side effect of doing something else (2012: p. 338). According to Nation, the incidental learning of vocabulary through reading is about acquiring and learning vocabulary “while the main focus of the learners’ attention is on the message of the text” and that “[l]earning from context thus includes learning from extensive reading” (2001: p. 232). On the notion of incidental learning, Nation claims that “[i]ncidental learning via guessing from context is the most important of all sources of vocabulary learning” (2001: p. 232). Guessing from context is a vocabulary learning strategy and is according to Nation “the strategy of using context into the various kinds of cue that a learner could draw on, including background knowledge and linguistic cues” (2001: p. 220). Brown further claims that “the meaning of a good many unknown words can be predicted from their context” (2007: p. 365). When it comes to incidental vocabulary acquisition, Nation emphasizes the importance of the amount of reading that is required in order to develop vocabulary through extensive reading (2001: p. 238). When it comes to intensive reading, the amount required is about 300-500 words according to Nation, whereas extensive reading requires a large amount of text so that words can be repeated several times for vocabulary development to take place (2001: p.149). More on intensive and extensive reading is discussed later on in section 2.3.
Moreover, intentional or deliberate vocabulary learning would fall under the category of language-focused input and is, according to Lundahl, a more efficient way to acquire vocabulary (2012: p. 344). According to Nation “[c]ontext sentences and phrases are valuable aids in intentional, language-focused vocabulary learning” (2001: p. 233). Furthermore, intentional learning is ‘intentional’ in the sense that the learners’ are aware of what particular items they are supposed to pay attention to and learn (2001: p. 233). Intensive reading would fall under the category of language-focused intentional learning.

Nation claims that second language learners should not rely entirely on incidental learning of vocabulary since “there needs to be judicious attention to decontextualized learning to supplement and be supplemented by learning from context” (2001: p. 238). Nation also mentions that a bottom-up approach is beneficial when it comes to incidental vocabulary learning since “if---learners have to rely heavily on linguistic bottom-up interpretation, guessing may be more laborious but learning of vocabulary may be greater” (2001: p. 239).

Furthermore, Nation claims that “a combination of attention-drawing activities such as presenting words to the learner before reading--- and defining words as they occur in context increases the amount of vocabulary learning” (2001: p. 251). In order to learn vocabulary from context (meaning-focused, incidental learning), a more deliberate and intentional focus on vocabulary, and skills and strategies on how to acquire vocabulary is necessary (language-focused, intentional learning). Meaning-focused, incidental learning focuses more on the meaning of the text where the learning is incidental, whereas language-focused, intentional learning focuses more on the language of the text where the learning is intentional. Nation further claims that a deliberate intentional focus on vocabulary shows more learning than incidental learning does, and that “small amounts of incidental vocabulary learning occur from reading” (2001: p. 149). Stahl and Nagy also criticize the notion of learning vocabulary from context since “the chance of learning the meaning of any particular word from one encounter with that word in context is rather slim (2006: p. 174). However, they also conclude that “incidental learning of words from continued massive exposure to rich---written language is essential for vocabulary growth” (2006: p. 54). Conclusively, a combination between meaning-focused incidental learning and language-focused intentional learning would be the most favorable approach when it comes to second language vocabulary acquisition, where the reader can focus both on meaning and linguistic features of a text.
The notion of receptive and productive knowledge is also something to consider when it comes to vocabulary acquisition. According to Nation, receptive and productive knowledge of vocabulary is about recognizing words when reading or listening (receptive) and producing words when writing or speaking (productive). Nation states that:

Essentially, receptive vocabulary use involves perceiving the form of a word while listening or reading and retrieving its meaning. Productive vocabulary use involves wanting to express a meaning through speaking or writing and retrieving and producing the appropriate spoken or written word form. (Nation 2001: p. 24-25)

Nation also claims that receptive knowledge and use of vocabulary is about, among other things, being able to recognize the word and knowing the meaning of it, while productive knowledge is about being able to produce the word to express the range of meanings of the particular word (2001: p. 26, 28). So there is a difference between receptive and productive vocabulary that needs to be considered, especially when it comes to assessing vocabulary knowledge. This can be compared to the notion of breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge, where receptive knowledge is more about breadth of knowledge as many can recognize more words than they can actively use in production such as speech or writing. The productive knowledge of vocabulary demonstrates more depth as the word is known on a level where it can be produced both in speech and writing, as opposed to just being recognized. The depth of vocabulary knowledge is also about how words are interrelated, how words occur syntactically and the range of meanings one word can have. The breadth of vocabulary knowledge is about recognizing and knowing numerous words. According to Nation “[f]or productive purposes their knowledge of the word form has to be more precise (2001: p .28).

In the next section, ways of assessing vocabulary knowledge are discussed.

2.3 Assessing Vocabulary Knowledge

When assessing vocabulary knowledge, one must consider what exactly is being tested since vocabulary knowledge has many aspects: the form, the meaning and the usage of a word. When it comes to acquiring vocabulary through literature, form and meaning are
the most interesting to assess since they test the learner’s recollection of the appropriate meaning of the word (receptive knowledge), as well as the learner’s ability to produce the appropriate word form to express its meaning (productive knowledge) according to Nation (2001: p. 347). One must also consider whether it is the breadth (how many words are known) or the depth (how well a particular word is known) of vocabulary knowledge that is being tested.

According to Nation, the use of translation as a means to assess vocabulary knowledge is very efficient despite the fact that “first language use is seen as reducing opportunities for second language practice” (2001: p. 351). However, Nation further claims that learners may find it difficult to explain the meaning of a word in the second or foreign language, which is why “[f]or second language learners, translation provides a much easier means of explaining the meanings of second language words” (2001: p. 351). However, one must also consider the difficulties in finding exact correspondence in meaning between L1 and L2 when it comes to using translation when assessing vocabulary knowledge.

Furthermore, Nation also claims that using sentence contexts proves to be beneficial in order to demonstrate word knowledge: “to provide learners with the greatest chance of showing the vocabulary knowledge they have, it seems appropriate to use matching items with a sentence context” and that testing words in context resulted in higher results than when the words were tested in isolation (2001: p. 353). A sentence context is when the word that is tested is situated in a phrase. The word is surrounded with other words, which set the word in a context. However, one must consider that the use of sentence contexts focuses more on guessing from context than on actually demonstrating word knowledge. The notion of using translations and sentence contexts is related to the language-focused intentional approach of learning since translations and sentence contexts focus on language acquisition because they focus on linguistic features and about learning specific words or phrases. Another way of testing and demonstrating vocabulary knowledge is by using multiple-choice items where the learners are provided with multiple choices of what one word means, so that, if the choices are not too closely related, the learners can draw on partial knowledge. However, multiple-choice items can also encourage guessing (Nation 2001: p. 349).

When it comes to vocabulary acquisition through reading, Nation claims that reading plus exercises results in more vocabulary learning than only reading (2001: p. 149). Examples of vocabulary exercises with reading texts involve underlining the
words in the text to draw attention to them, matching words with pictures or the like or guessing from context, to mention a few (Nation 2001: p. 159). He also mentions that the direct focus on vocabulary in intensive reading “can raise learner’s awareness of particular words so that they notice them when they meet them while reading” (2001: p. 157). However, Nation also raises the issue of how teaching vocabulary alone is “ignoring the important world knowledge that lies behind it and which is critical for effective reading” (2001; p.157).

Additionally, when it comes to testing vocabulary knowledge, one must remember the difference between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge, and that there are also different ways of assessing these. According to Nation, “receptive knowledge is that used in listening and reading, and involves going from the form of a word to its meaning” where the way of testing receptive knowledge is by translating the selected word into the learner’s first language. Productive knowledge however, is about going from the meaning of the word to the word form where the test is about translating the word from the first language into English (2001: p. 359).

In the next section of the literature review, the role of literature on vocabulary acquisition is discussed and reviewed.

2.4 The Role of Literature on Vocabulary Acquisition

According to Lundahl the Swedish national curriculum, stories and literature are to be used as tools in order to acquire linguistic attributes, such as vocabulary (2012: p. 410). He also points out that it is important to notice how words, phrases and expressions give the text its character and meaning (2012: p. 409). This brings back the notion of how vocabulary is essential when it comes to understanding a text and that there is a close connection between reading and vocabulary acquisition (2012: p. 334).

However, as previously mentioned, there are those that question the relevance of using literature and who argue that any other random text could contribute to the development of vocabulary just as well as a literary text would do, as Parkinson and Thomas point out: “the status of the text as literature is not important – the activities could equally well be done with a journalistic or nonfiction text” (2004: p. 32). That is true. However, there are studies where, according to Parkinson and Thomas, “[t]he results indicated that students felt ‘that the most effective literary form for helping them develop their linguistic skills and cultural awareness is the novel’” (2004: p. 106).
Literature, (as fiction: novels, short stories, drama, poetry), can be used for both intensive and extensive reading depending on what the purpose or learning goal is. Parkinson and Thomas claim that “foreign language study through literature involves all these kinds [knowing vocabulary, grammar, orthographical patterns, phonology] of learning and sometimes --- it is the main or only kind of learning – or at least of intended learning” (2004: p. 147). They mean that when studying foreign language through literature, sometimes the only learning goal is acquiring linguistic skills like the ones mentioned. One must not also forget that the Swedish curriculum also states that a range of different texts is to be studied, and that literature is just one of these and that the other types of texts should not be excluded from the study of English at the upper secondary level (Lgr11). Parkinson and Thomas also point out that:

[I]iterary texts often have patterns in their vocabulary, over and above those necessary for simply telling the story, and a good learner may be able to spot such patterns --- thereby demonstrating and at the same time probably extending (by checking unknown words and secondary meanings) his or her vocabulary knowledge. (Parkinson & Thomas 2004: p. 147)

Intensive reading would fall under the category of language-focused intentional learning, as Nation claims: “[a]lthough the aim of intensive reading is to understand the text, the procedures involved direct a lot of attention to the vocabulary --- This deliberate attention to language features means that intensive reading fits within the strand of language-focused learning” (2001: p. 149). This approach would be the most beneficial when the purpose is to develop linguistic skills such as vocabulary acquisition, grammar and the like. A bottom-up approach would most likely also be applied in a language-focused learning situation in the sense that the learner focuses on small bits of the text (words and phrases e.g.). However, there are several arguments for the benefits of extensive reading that would fall under the category of meaning-focused incidental learning. Brown emphasizes the benefits of extensive reading arguing that it is valuable because “extensive reading---is a key to student gains in reading ability, linguistic competence, vocabulary, spelling and writing” (2007: p. 360). He also claims that “[b]y stimulating reading for enjoyment or reading where all concepts, names, dates, and other details need not be retained, students gain an appreciation for the affective and cognitive window of reading” (2007: p. 373). In other words, by letting the
students read without having to learn something specific, like words or answering questions about the content, the students can appreciate the text on a more emotional and intellectual level. A top-down approach would most likely be applied in a meaning-focused learning situation where the text is approached from the ‘top’ in the sense that the focus is not on the small bits of the text, but on the larger picture, namely, the meaning of the text. Nation further promotes extensive reading since it allows readers to choose what to read according to their own interests, subsequently increasing the motivation for learning. It also allows learning to occur outside the classroom (2001: p. 151). However, Nation also claims that an intentional language-focused approach displays more learning than meaning-focused incidental learning does, and that “small amounts of incidental vocabulary learning occur from reading. These small amounts can become big if learners read large quantities of comprehensible text” (2001: p. 149). This means that in order to acquire vocabulary through meaning-focused incidental learning through extensive reading, it presupposes that the learner reads a large amount of text. He also states that “vocabulary learning from extensive reading is very fragile. If the small amount of learning of a word is not soon reinforced by another meeting, then that learning will be lost” (2001: p. 155).

The notion of a cognitive and expressivist approach to reading has also been discussed. A cognitive approach to reading can be related to the approach of bottom-up and the intentional language-focused learning of intensive reading. However, as previously pointed out, McCormick also emphasizes the importance of the expressivist approach where the reader draws on his/her own life experience in order to construct meaning in the text. Nevertheless, a cognitive approach is most relevant when it comes to acquiring vocabulary through literature, since the primary focus of cognitive work is to dissect and quantify every aspect of the reading process where the work must begin at the micro-level of letter and word recognition before the reader can take on an expressivist or social-cultural approach and infer meaning to the text.

Vocabulary can be acquired and developed from all different approaches. A language-focused approach where the learning is intentional would be more efficient, as the learners are aware what the learning goal is and can focus on vocabulary acquisition. However, extensive reading from a meaning-focused incidental learning approach is also valuable since it can offer more than just vocabulary acquisition. However, it presupposes processing large quantities of text for the reader to acquire and develop vocabulary. Conclusively, vocabulary can be acquired and developed through literature;
it is just a matter of choosing which approach to take according to what the purpose or learning goal of the reading activity is. Nation comments on this issue that these approaches are not particularly relevant to studies of vocabulary learning, but “[w]hat is important is the quality of the mental processing that takes place during learning” (2001: p. 233). These approaches are, however, relevant when it comes to determining how to approach reading in order to acquire vocabulary. Extensive reading would be the best approach if the purpose were to acquire vocabulary incidentally while reading and when vocabulary acquisition is not the main purpose of the reading, whereas intensive reading would be more efficient as vocabulary learning is intentional and conscious.

Since vocabulary acquisition is the main purpose of this study, and the goal is to investigate vocabulary development through a short literary text, the text is approached from ‘the bottom’. That is because when the reader encounters a text in a second or foreign language he/she will probably encounter unfamiliar words and expressions. This means that the student approaches the text by deciphering small bits of the text such as words, to be able to understand the text on the whole; that is, bottom-up. The other approach to employ in this particular context is the language-focused approach to reading, since it focuses on language. The third approach employed in this study is intensive reading, which complements language-focused learning. Intensive reading is more effective when it comes to vocabulary acquisition, due to the deliberate attention to language features and the fact that vocabulary learning through extensive reading is very fragile.

In the next section, the study and the implementation of the study will be explained in more detail.
3. Method

The aim of this study is to investigate if vocabulary is acquired through literature (as fiction). In order to investigate the fact that literature is a source for vocabulary acquisition and subsequently contributes to the development of vocabulary, a study has been implemented. The purpose of this study is to see if students acquired vocabulary by reading a short text (intensive reading) and by drawing attention to the words (language-focused learning from a bottom-up approach).

Note that this essay does not serve to investigate the best way of learning vocabulary, but only serves to investigate the hypothesis that vocabulary can be acquired through literature. This is why the study does not compare how vocabulary is acquired through meaning-focused incidental learning (extensive reading) in comparison with language-focused intentional learning (intensive reading). The study only serves to investigate vocabulary acquisition through intensive reading, basically because that it is more efficient in the sense that it is language-focused, while extensive reading is more of a long term process that has more focus on meaning than on language where vocabulary is acquired incidentally and unconsciously rather than intentionally and consciously. It would have been interesting to investigate and compare both approaches but since time is limited, the most suitable way of carrying out the study is through language-focused intensive reading in a shorter text, in order to fit the time schedule. A shorter text is the most suitable choice since the study is carried out from a language-focused approach through intensive reading and according to Nation “[i]ntensive reading involves the close deliberate study of short texts---usually around 300-500 words long” (2001 p. 149).

First, the implementation of the study is reviewed followed by a discussion about the validity and reliability of the study.

3.1 Implementing the Study

According to Annika Eliasson, quantitative methods are about gathering data that is measurable and are most suitable when the aim of the study is to measure or generalize certain phenomena into a larger context (2010: p. 28). She also claims that quantitative methods are most beneficial when it comes to studies of larger groups (2010: p. 30). Since the goal of this study is to see if vocabulary is acquired through reading literature,
the study is quantitative in the sense that the results are measurable. The choice of literature; *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* is motivated by its popularity among youths and the fact that it is a well-known book and written for a younger audience and therefore suitable for adolescents.

Intensive reading focuses on language features, which means that the learning is intentional and in order to aid learning the students were made aware of the fact that vocabulary acquisition was the learning goal, which is why the words in question were underlined in the text, drawing the attention to them in order to raise the students’ awareness of the particular words. However, no other vocabulary exercises were implemented since the purpose of the study is investigating learning vocabulary through literature alone and not through any specific exercises.

The breadth of the students’ vocabulary knowledge (in this particular context, and not their total breadth of vocabulary knowledge) before reading is compared with the breadth of the students’ vocabulary knowledge after reading. The breadth of the vocabulary knowledge is assessed counting the total number of correct answers, in other words, how many words the students recognize and know the definition of. The depth of vocabulary knowledge is not tested since the study only investigates the number of correct answers (vocabulary breadth) and does not investigate the depth of knowledge of particular words. The students only translate the words and demonstrate their recognition of the words, which is receptive vocabulary knowledge, and not how they can use the words in a productive sense or in different contexts, which is a demonstration of the depth of vocabulary knowledge.

The study is about word recognition and assesses the students’ vocabulary breadth as well as their receptive vocabulary knowledge. The breadth of the students’ vocabulary knowledge was assessed by letting the students translate the English words into the corresponding meaning in Swedish, assessing their receptive vocabulary knowledge in the sense that they only needed to recognize the word and not use it in production. The total number of correct answers was measured and compared with the total number of correct answers after reading in order to see if the breadth of their vocabulary knowledge increased or not through intensive reading of fictional literature, with focus on certain words with the goal that the students would acquire these words.

The test was carried out on 21 adolescents between the ages 15-16 in a Swedish Secondary School in an English class in the ninth grade. Before reading the text, the students were given a translation test, including 11 words from the test, as well as 9
words not included in the test in order to see if it is the text that helped to acquire vocabulary or not (TEST 1). These 9 words are distractor items and the role of these is to see whether it is the text or not that helped the students to acquire the words. The 9 distractor items were not included in the text and is a way to assess how practice effects influence the results. More on practice effects is discussed in the next section. The students were instructed to translate the English words into Swedish, or give an explanation of the meaning if they could not find the exact correspondence in Swedish; this is a way of assessing their receptive knowledge of the words, since it is about recalling the appropriate meaning of the word. The breadth is measured based on the number of correct answers.

TEST 1 measures the total number of correct answers before any contact with the text. After TEST 1, the students read the text. After having read the text, where the 11 target words were underlined, the students did TEST 2, which consists of the same words on TEST 1, but in a different order. TEST 2 measures the total number of correct answers after having read the text. TEST 3 was implemented after a few days and has the same form as TEST 1 and TEST 2, but with the words in a different order. TEST 3 measures the total number of correct answers after having read the text in order to see if the learning has long-term effects or just involves short-term retention.

As previously mentioned “for second language learners, translation provides a much easier means of explaining the meanings of second language words” and that is a useful way of testing vocabulary, which is why the students demonstrated their knowledge through a translation test (Nation 2001: p. 351). The choice of translation is also based on the fact that it is a way of assessing receptive vocabulary knowledge, as previously discussed in the literature review.

3.2 Validity and Reliability

Internal validity is about the accuracy of the results in the study, in other words, is a question about whether the study actually measures what the study is said to measure. External validity is a question about whether the results of the study can be generalized to a greater population or not (Bailey, 1994: 67, 71).

Internal reliability, or internal consistency, is about the consistency of the data in the study, in other words, that the test-items correlate to each other in the way that they measure the same thing. External reliability, or test-retest reliability, is about whether the same study or measurement method would produce the same results if it were to be
done again under the same conditions (California State University, Research Methods for Dummies: Reliability of Measurement).

This study measures the breadth of students’ vocabulary knowledge via three translations tests. Context sentences were avoided because of their inaccuracy when it comes to what kind of knowledge the students are actually demonstrating. This is about the internal reliability of the study and that the tests measure the same thing and not allow students to guess and not demonstrate their actual knowledge of the words. Translation then also excludes the risks of the students just guessing from context. Multiple-choice items were also excluded based on the same reasons for excluding sentence contexts, which is the risk of the students just guessing. This is because the goal of the study is to investigate whether the work of literature itself, not a specific exercise, contributes to developing vocabulary or not. This is about the internal validity of the study to make sure that the tests actually measure vocabulary knowledge with the help of literature, and not students’ ability to guess from context and between multiple choices.

One must also consider the internal validity when it comes to taking a test, for example the risk of some students cheating when sitting next to each other during the tests, which may influence the results. Also consider the influence of practice effects, which is, according to BusinessDictionary.com, how past experience influences a test that has been taken previously, especially if the interval between the tests is short, and may result in the score increasing by each test. The 9 distractor items included in the tests are to make sure that the tests actually measure improvement with the help of literature, and not just because of practice effects. By comparing the results of the target words and the distractor words, conclusions can be drawn about whether the results improve because of the text or because of practice effects. This will help to improve the internal validity of the study.

Also note that the results of this study are not statistically significant since this is an exploratory study rather than a controlled experiment. The study is limited, since only 21 students in one class were tested. This is an issue that the study does not achieve external validity, since the results of this study cannot be generalized to a greater population.

The fact that the students had to do the test a third time is about the external reliability of the study and a way to assess long-term effects of learning. Since external reliability is about whether the same study or measurement method would produce the
same results if it were to be done again under the same conditions, a third test helps to achieve this.
4. Results

In this section, the results will be demonstrated. The total number of correct answers, both the target words and the distractor words, will be demonstrated in percentage.

On TEST 1, the students received a total of 52% correct answers on the target words and a total of 40% corrects answers on the distractor words.

On TEST 2, the students received a total of 61% correct answers on the target words and a total of 40% correct answers on the distractor words.

On TEST 3, the students received a total of 71% correct answers on the target words and a total of 46% correct answers on the distractor words (see chart below).

**CHART 1: Percentage of Total Number of Correct Answers on Target Words and Distractor Words**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TEST 1</th>
<th>TEST 2</th>
<th>TEST 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distractor</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study shows that the total number of correct answers after reading increased by 17%: from 121 correct answers before reading on TEST 1 to 142 correct answers after reading on TEST 2 on account of the target words. On account of the distractor words, no change was demonstrated from TEST 1 to TEST 2.

From TEST 2 to TEST 3, the total number of correct answers on the target words increased with 16%: from 142 correct answers on TEST 2 to 165 correct answers on TEST 3. On account of the distractor words, the total number of correct answers
increased with 13%: from 76 correct answers on TEST 2 to 86 correct answers on TEST 3.

The study also shows that 76% of the students improved on the vocabulary test on account of the target words after reading from TEST 1 to TEST 2. 16 of the 21 students in the study increased their score on the test after reading the short text. Three of the students received the same score on the target words after reading, while two of the students decreased their score on the target words.

Based on the results on the target words on TEST 1, the 21 students were divided into three different groups: low performers with a score between 0-5, average performers with a score between 6-7 and high performers with a score between 8-11. This is to see how the method works for each group of students based on the level of proficiency. These results indicate that all three groups improved on account of the target words. The low performers-group received a total of 10% correct answers on TEST 1, a total of 13% on TEST 2 and a total of 14% correct answers on TEST 3. The average performers-group received a total of 16% correct answer on TEST 1, a total of 19% on TEST 2 and a total of 24% correct answers on TEST 3. The high performers-group received a total of 26% correct answers on TEST 1, a total of 29% on TEST 2 and a total of 33% correct answers on TEST 3 (see chart below).

**CHART 2: Percentage of Total Number of Correct Answers on Target Words**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>TEST 1</th>
<th>TEST 2</th>
<th>TEST 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low performers</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High performers</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On account of the distractor words no change was demonstrated from TEST 1 to TEST 2. From TEST 2 to TEST 3 however, some change was demonstrated in all three groups. The low performers-group received a total of 6% correct answers on TEST 1, 6% on TEST 2 and a total of 7% correct answers on TEST 3. The average performers-group received a total of 15% correct answers on TEST 1, 15% on TEST 2 and a total of 16% correct answers on TEST 3. The high performers-group received a total of 20% correct answers on TEST 1, 20% on TEST 2 and a total of 22% correct answers on TEST 3 (see chart below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Total Number of Correct Answers on Distractor Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEST 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low performers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average performers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High performers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 9 randomly selected words that were not in the text was to see if the students improved on these as well, or just the words that were in the text. The total number of correct answers on these nine words before reading on TEST 1 was 76. After reading, the score was the same, 76 on TEST 2. No students managed to figure out more words of the 9 distractor words that were not included in the text, but they all managed to figure out more words of the 11 target words that were included in the text after reading on TEST 2.

Moving on to TEST 3, where the students had to do the vocabulary test yet again in order to see if the students had acquired the words and could recognize them after a few days and if the learning is long-term or just short-term retention. The results show that the total number of correct answers on the 11 target words included in the text on
TEST 3 increased with 36% from TEST 1. These results show a significant improvement on TEST 3 in comparison with TEST 1, where the results show a total number of 121 correct answers on TEST 1 and a total number of 165 correct answers on TEST 3. The results from TEST 3 also show improvement from TEST 2 with an increase of 16%, from 142 to 165. The results on the 9 distractor words that were not included in the text show no change from TEST 1 to TEST 2, but remain a total number of 76 correct answers. On TEST 3 however, the score on the 9 distractor words increased from 76 to 86, which may be a result of practice effects. The results demonstrate that the average performers-group demonstrated the best improvement, both from TEST 2 to TEST 3 with an increase of 24%, and from TEST 1 to TEST 3 with an increase of 47%. However, from TEST 1 to TEST 2, the low performers-group demonstrated the best improvement with an increase of 25% (see chart and table below).

CHART 4: Percentage of Improvement on Target Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage of improvement on target words from TEST 1 to TEST 2</th>
<th>Percentage of improvement on target words from TEST 2 to TEST 3</th>
<th>Percentage of improvement on target words from TEST 1 to TEST 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low performers</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average performers</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High performers</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 1: Percentage of Improvement on Target Words:
4.1 Analysis of the Results

The test assessed the students’ knowledge of the 11 target words that were included in the text as well their knowledge of the 9 distractor words that were not included in the text. They demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the words by translating the words from English to Swedish; in several cases the students also explained the meaning or conception of the word when they could not find the exact corresponding expression in Swedish. The total number of correct answers before reading the text then demonstrates the level of vocabulary knowledge of the 11 target words in the text in this particular context (a class of 21 students), which is a total of 52% correct answers. After reading the short draft from a literary text, all students improved in the sense that they were all able to figure out the meaning of more words than they could before reading. The total number of correct answers after reading then demonstrates the level of vocabulary knowledge with the help of literature, which is total of 61% correct answers. The conclusion is then that in this context the reading of the text helped the students to figure out the meaning of the words that they did not know before reading, subsequently developing their vocabulary.

The students managed to increase the total number of correct answers with 17% with the help of the text on the second test. The fact that the students did not demonstrate any significant improvement on the 9 distractor words that were not included in the text from TEST 1 to TEST 2 also serves as an indicator that the literature helped the students to acquire and understand more words.

On the third test after a few days, the results increased on the account of the 11 target words that were included in the test. From the first test to the third test the total number of correct answers increased from 121 to 165, that is an increase of 36%. One must also consider the practice effects that influence the results. For the 9 distractor words that were not included in the text, a significant improvement was demonstrated from the second test to the third test. This may be the influence of practice effects. From TEST 1 to TEST 2 however, no improvement on the 9 distractor words was demonstrated whereas there was improvement with an increase of 17% correct words on the 11 target words that were included in the text, which might be an indication that it was with the help of literature that the students acquired and developed their vocabulary.
5. Conclusion

The relevance of this investigation has its roots in the fact that literature is an important aspect of English education and it is stated in the national curriculum of Swedish education that literature, as fiction, is to be part of English education in Swedish schools. Furthermore, as many often use vocabulary development as an argument for reading in school, the notion of how literature can contribute to developing vocabulary is both interesting and relevant when it comes to English education and the reasons for using fictional literature as an educational tool. If literature can contribute to the development of vocabulary, the reasons for using literature as a tool for learning acquisition are that much stronger which is why the purpose of this essay is to investigate different aspects of learning through literature and implement a study to see if literature can contribute to developing vocabulary. The results of the study serve to either support or disprove the hypothesis that literature contributes to develop vocabulary. The results can however only serve to support the hypothesis in a smaller context since the study was performed in only one class consisting of 21 students.

In order to understand second language acquisition through reading, different approaches like bottom-up and top-down have been discussed. The bottom-up approach is about deciphering small bits of the text such as words, to be able to understand the text on the whole; that is bottom-up, while top-down is more about guessing the meaning of an unfamiliar word by employing previous knowledge about the world, by the context which surrounds the word and determining whether there were any pictures in relation to the text that can contribute to assimilate the content of the text. However, as discussed, the bottom-up approach is more applicable when it comes to acquiring vocabulary through reading, while a top-down approach would be more suitable when the purpose of reading is to explore the meaning or the message of the text, for example. The cognitive approach as well as the expressivist and social-cultural approach along with the schema theory have also been discussed. This schema theory has connections with the expressivist approach and the social-cultural approach to reading, as all approaches are about inferring meaning for the text and drawing on one’s life experience to be able to do this.

Additionally, there are more approaches to consider when it comes to reading and vocabulary acquisition. The language-focused approach focuses on the language of the
text while the meaning-focused approach focuses on the meaning of the text. Conclusively, the language-focused approach can be inferred as being more relevant when it comes to acquiring vocabulary through reading. The notion of intensive and extensive reading has also been discussed, where extensive reading would be the best approach if the purpose is to acquire vocabulary incidentally while reading and when vocabulary acquisition is not the main purpose of reading, whereas intensive reading would be more efficient when the main purpose of reading is about acquiring vocabulary, as vocabulary learning is intentional and conscious.

When it comes to vocabulary, one must also consider the difference between receptive and productive knowledge, where receptive knowledge of vocabulary is about recognizing words from reading or listening while productive knowledge of vocabulary is about producing by writing or speaking. This also raises the notion of breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge, where the breadth of vocabulary knowledge is about how many words are known, whereas the depth of vocabulary knowledge is about how well a particular word is known.

Based on these conclusions about the different approaches to reading and vocabulary acquisition, the study investigated if literature can contribute to acquiring and developing vocabulary by employing a short fictional text (intensive reading) where the main purpose of reading is word recognition and vocabulary acquisition (language-focused, bottom-up approach) in order to investigate vocabulary development (receptive vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary breadth). The results of the study show that 76% of the students in the study improved on the words that were included in the text, as they were all able to figure out the meaning of more words after reading, leading to an improvement from their performance before reading the text. This implies that the literary text helped the students to understand more words, subsequently increasing and developing their vocabulary. The low performance-group proved to have increased their total number of correct answers on the 11 target words from TEST 1 to TEST 3 with 38%. The average performance-group improved with 47% and the high performance-group improved with 28%. The fact that the total number of correct answers increased on the third test also indicates long-term effects of learning. Nevertheless, one must also consider the practice effects that may influence the results since the students demonstrated improvement on the 9 distractor words as well on TEST 3, as the total number of correct answers on the 9 distractor words increased with 13% from TEST 1 and TEST 2. Also notice that the study can only support the hypothesis in a specific
context, namely from a language-focused, bottom-up approach through intensive reading, accounting receptive vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary breadth.

The results of this investigation can support the hypothesis that literature contributes to developing vocabulary, due to the improvement demonstrated on all three tests on account of the 11 target words that were included in the text. The results can also be used as an argument for using literature as a linguistic educational tool in school. This study can serve as supplementary evidence for the significance and relevance of literature and can help teachers to provide their students with more reasons for using fictional literature, instead of using the textbook for example, for the purpose of acquiring linguistic skills. This study reinforces the importance of literature and substantiates the reasons why literature is used in school, and that literature does not only contribute to developing reading ability, but also contributes to developing linguistic skills such as the vocabulary and is accordingly a strong argument for using literature as an educational tool in school.
References


"As you know, three champions compete in the tournament," Dumbledore went on calmly, "one from each of the participating schools. They will be marked on how well they perform each of the Tournament tasks and the champion with the highest total after task three will win the Triwizard Cup. The champions will be chosen by an impartial selector: the Goblet of Fire."

Dumbledore now took out his wand and tapped three times upon the top of the casket. The lid creaked slowly open. Dumbledore reached inside it and pulled out a large, roughly hewn wooden cup. It would have been entirely unremarkable had it not been full to the brim with dancing blue-white flames.

Dumbledore closed the casket and placed the goblet carefully on top of it, where it would be clearly visible to everyone in the Hall.

"Anybody wishing to submit themselves as champion must write their name and school clearly upon a slip of parchment and drop it into the goblet," said Dumbledore. "Aspiring champions have twenty-four hours in which to put their names forward. Tomorrow night, Halloween, the goblet will return the names of the three it has judged most worthy to represent their schools. The goblet will be placed in the entrance hall tonight, where it will be freely accessible to all those wishing to compete.

"To ensure that no underage student yields to temptation," said Dumbledore, "I will be drawing an Age Line around the Goblet of Fire once it has been placed in the entrance hall. Nobody under the age of seventeen will be able to cross this line.

"Finally, I wish to impress upon any of you wishing to compete that this tournament is not to be entered into lightly. Once a champion has been selected by the Goblet of Fire, he or she is obliged to see the tournament through to the end. The placing of your name in the goblet constitutes a binding, magical contract. There can be no change of heart once you have become a champion. Please be very sure, therefore, that you are wholeheartedly prepared to play before you drop your name into the goblet. Now, I think it is time for bed. Good night to you all.
TEST 1

Please translate these words into Swedish (Översätt dessa ord till svenska)

1. involve:
2. visible:
3. selected:
4. lid:
5. participating:
6. enlighten:
7. brim:
8. submit:
9. temptation:
10. excess:
11. ensure:
12. carton:
13. unremarkable:
14. increase:
15. task:
16. shore:
17. express:
18. obliged:
19. casket:
20. pattern:
TEST 2

Please translate these words into Swedish (Översätt dessa ord till svenska)

1. express:

2. increase:

3. selected:

4. lid:

5. participating:

6. enlighten:

7. brim:

8. involve:

9. temptation:

10. excess:

11. ensure:

12. casket:

13. unremarkable:

14. visible:

15. task:

16. pattern:

17. submit:

18. obliged:

19. carton:

20. shore:
TEST 3

Please translate these words into Swedish (Översätt dessa ord till svenska)

1. carton:
2. increase:
3. enlighten:
4. shore:
5. participating:
6. selected:
7. pattern:
8. excess:
9. obliged:
10. express:
11. ensure:
12. casket:
13. unremarkable:
14. visible:
15. task:
16. brim:
17. submit:
18. temptation:
19. involve:
20. lid: